

Sweet Surprises



A remarkable tale of discovery,
friendship and happiness



Disney

Beauty and the Beast

Sweet Surprises



AUTUMN
PUBLISHING

When the bells on the door of the Jolie Bakery jingled, Claire, the baker's daughter, looked up from behind the counter. Her face lit up when she saw who it was.

"Bonjour, Belle!" Claire sang out. Belle gave her young friend a warm smile and set down the stack of books she was carrying.

"Mmm, it seems I'm just in time for some fresh chocolate croissants, too!" Belle said. Claire chose a pastry for each of them and joined Belle at a table.

"Are those new?" she asked Belle hopefully, pointing to the books. Belle often stopped by and read to Claire after a visit to the library. Claire loved listening to tales of faraway places as she iced cakes or rolled out dough.

"Actually, I'm about to return those books. We have already read them," Belle told her. Then, seeing Claire's disappointment, she added, "Shall I make up a story instead?"



“Yes, please!” Claire
replied. “But let’s eat our
croissants first.”



Then, while Claire iced a cake, Belle invented a fairy tale about a flying purple dragon, an ancient wizard and a clever princess who freed the entire kingdom from an evil spell.

“I wish I could make up stories like that,” Claire said with a sigh.

“Have you ever tried?” Belle asked.





They went to the back room so Claire could prepare the day's bread deliveries.

"Sometimes I can think of a beginning to a story, but not an end. Or I can think of the end, but not the beginning!" the little girl admitted. "I don't have a very good imagination."

Claire's father, Henri, overheard them.

"Ma chérie," he said, "you have a lot of imagination! You just need to figure out how best to use it."

"Oui, Papa," Claire said thoughtfully.







Before long, the bread was ready. Belle offered to help Claire deliver it around town.

Soon, Belle and Claire passed the dressmaker's shop. In the window was a very fancy dress.

"It looks like a wedding cake," Claire remarked. The skirt was made of tiers of satin, and the pink ribbons looked like icing. "Madame designs all of the gowns herself," Claire said. "She's so talented!"

"Indeed she is," Belle agreed.

As they passed the florist's shop, Claire admired a bouquet. "Aren't these pretty?" she said. "Madame Fleuret is so good at putting the right flowers and colours together."

Belle nodded, but she noticed that Claire seemed troubled. She asked her what was wrong.

"Everyone in our village is good at something – except for me," Claire blurted out. "You can make up wonderful stories. The dressmaker can design beautiful dresses. And Madame Fleuret can take a bunch of ordinary flowers and turn them into a work of art."

"You're an excellent baker," Belle pointed out.

"But I want to make something beautiful and creative," Claire said.



From that moment on, Claire was determined to find a hobby that let her create something unique.

The next time Belle walked into the bakery, Claire rushed out from behind the counter and handed her friend a big box with a bow on top. "For you!" Claire said proudly. "I designed it myself."

“Why, thank you!” Belle replied, surprised. She opened the box and pulled out a dress.

But what a dress! It was sewn from patches of mismatched fabric. One sleeve was attached down near the waist. And the buttons were all out of place. Belle didn’t know what to say. Luckily, Claire spoke first.

“Goodness, it’s ugly, isn’t it?” the little girl said, starting to laugh.

“Well, it is unusual,” Belle said with a giggle.

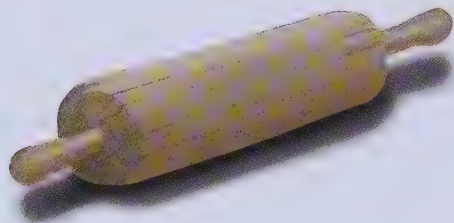


“Bad news,” Claire announced to Belle a few days later. “I tried writing poetry, but I’m terrible.”

“Are you sure?” asked Belle as she sat down on the steps of the bakery.

“Just listen,” Claire said, then she read aloud:

*“Sometimes when I roll out the dough,
The rolling pin drops on my toes.
While in the oven the tart bakes,
Alas, my foot still throbs and aches!”*



“You’re good at writing a funny poem,” Belle pointed out.

“That’s just the problem,” Claire replied sadly. “I wasn’t trying to be funny.” She paused. “I’ll just try something else.”









The following afternoon, Claire arrived at the cottage where Belle lived with her father, Maurice. The girl was wearing an artist's smock and carrying a canvas under her arm.

"I want you to be completely honest," she told Belle as she unrolled a portrait she had just painted.

"It's... um... very interesting," Belle said. "Is it Madame Fleuret's dog, Gigi?" she guessed.

"It's you," Claire confessed.

"Well, of course it is!" agreed Belle. "I just didn't recognise myself with that different – and very pretty – new hairstyle you gave me."

Claire sighed. "Belle, thank you for being so nice, but the truth is, I'm no good at painting either."

“Don’t worry, Claire,” Belle reassured her. “It’s just like your dad said – you just haven’t found the best way to use your imagination. You’ll figure it out soon.”

Just then, Maurice called to his daughter. Belle and Claire went to his workshop and found him tinkering with his latest invention. It looked like a bicycle with an engine, dials, an exhaust pipe – and a miniature trumpet for a horn!

“Look!” he cried. “It’s a vroomicycle, to help people get places more quickly.”

“That’s great, Papa!” Belle cried. “I’ve got to run, though. It’s time to walk Claire back into town.”

“Why does your dad invent things?” Claire asked Belle as they walked towards the bakery.





“He can’t help it,” Belle answered. “When he looks at an ordinary object, he sees how it might become new and different.”

The next morning, Belle arrived at the bakery very early. It was Maurice’s birthday, and she was going to help Claire bake a cake. As the little girl cracked eggs, sifted flour and whipped up a custard filling, Belle practised with the pastry bag.

Squirt! The custard landed all over Claire’s father.

“Mmmmm,” Henri said, tasting it. “Magnifique!”

When the cake was done, Belle thanked Claire for her hard work. “My father will love it,” she said.

Suddenly, Claire clapped her hands together. “I know how to make this a cake Monsieur Maurice will never forget!” she cried.





Claire quickly made more cake, icing and filling. Then she added it all to Maurice's cake. When she was done, the cake looked a lot like Maurice's invention!

"Claire!" exclaimed Belle. "Don't you see? Baking is where your creativity shines through!"

Claire beamed proudly. She did have a good imagination – and now she knew how best to use it!

A couple of days later, Belle went into town and saw a crowd in front of the bakery window. When she joined them, she saw what they were so interested in – loaves of bread shaped like swans and cakes that resembled fancy hats.







The next day, Belle walked by the bakery again. Another crowd was gathered by the window. This time, they were looking at a huge cake in the shape of a castle. The drawbridge was made of peppermint sticks, and the flowered vines that climbed up the castle walls were, in fact, yummy sweets!

Belle entered the bakery.

“Claire, your baking is the talk of the town!” she exclaimed.

Claire smiled. “Remember when you said your father doesn’t just see what’s in front of him – but what it might become? I’ve been looking at bread and cake every day without realising I could turn them into something extra special.”





Belle turned to Henri. "What do you think of Claire's creations?" she asked.

"I think they are the product of a wonderful imagination!" the baker replied. Then he winked and added, "She gets that from me, you know!"







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When Claire, the baker's daughter in Belle's village, worries that her imagination isn't big enough, Belle sets out to help her discover where her true talents lie.

From dress-making to painting to poetry, can Claire finally begin to believe in herself and create something wonderful of her own?

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